

Voice-Directed Picking



Sealey Tools Achieves Significant Productivity Uplift with New Voice-Enabled Solution from Dakota

The Company

Founded in 1978, Sealey Tools is well-known nationally and internationally as a leading brand of professional tools and workshop equipment. With a global reputation for innovation, quality and unparalleled after-sales service, Sealey is a 100% family-owned entity, boasting one of the world's largest ranges of workshop essentials which is backed by total compliance testing, unrivalled parts availability and extended product guarantees.

Supplying over 12,000 product lines specifically designed for use in the trade, Sealey is committed to selling through a network of local independent dealers and upholds an enviable and hard-earned reputation for providing high-quality products at the best value, whilst offering a service to its clients which is second-to-none.

When the company experienced an unexpected, significant and sustained increase in orders during the Covid pandemic lockdown, its warehouse was under extreme pressure to keep up with such an unprecedented upturn in demand. So much so, that the company decided to improve its product-picking technology to remain in line with its unwavering customer delivery promises.



Voice-Directed Technology



Product Picking Solution



Seamless Integration with Microsoft Dynamics AX



Increased Worker Productivity



The Problem

As a business, Sealey very much sees itself as a progressive company. Never inclined to stand still in terms of its product offering, this progression is also mirrored in past technology adoptions within its warehouse operation to improve efficiency and streamline productivity.

Tim Thompson, Commercial Director at Sealey explains, *“At Sealey, we are constantly working to improve our processes to continuously enhance and improve our service offering. The sudden increase in demand for our products during the 2020 lockdown meant that we were struggling to achieve this; something which does not sit well with our overall corporate ethos of providing exceptional levels of service. For us, the differentiator between a ‘good warehouse’ and a ‘great warehouse’ had always been the use of digital data capture using scanners or mobile computers, however we needed to look for something even more future-proof to help us cope with our increase in order volumes. We had already considered the concept of voice in the past, so when Dakota contacted us about their solution, which is underpinned by Honeywell voice technology, we were only too happy to explore it further.”*

With a rich and established history in supplying a range of customers within the supply chain sector with fit-for-purpose data capture solutions designed to improve efficiency, accuracy and reliability within a variety of mission-critical processes, Dakota’s range of voice solutions empowers businesses to reach new heights in terms of data capture performance and overall business functionality.

Charlie Cowan, Account Manager at Dakota explains, *“Conceptually, voice-directed picking is very similar to traditional scanner picking using RF data capture devices, however with voice, prompts are delivered and responses are provided through the spoken word, offering businesses a wealth of benefits including an increase in worker productivity by up to 35% and a reduction in errors by up to 50%. In a voice-directed warehouse, operators use a compact, wearable computer with a headset to receive instructions by voice. The computer is connected to the host business system (ERP or WMS) over a wireless network and the operator confirms his or her actions verbally back to the system in real time.”*

During initial site visits to the Sealey warehouse, Dakota took the time to understand its critical pain points, conducting a thorough site survey in order to get under the bonnet of the business and understand its inner workings.

Thompson comments, *“Dakota, along with its partners Mountain Leverage, couldn’t have been more helpful. Together, they undertook complex site survey investigations and evaluations to enable them to ascertain if a voice system would help alleviate our issues. Based on the resultant numbers and findings of these comprehensive examinations, it was concluded that a voice solution would provide extensive tangible benefits to our warehouse operation. At the time of initially exploring technological alternatives to conventional scanning, we couldn’t get products out of the door fast enough. It was therefore imperative to find a new and more advanced product-picking solution. Since we were highly satisfied by the competency of both Dakota’s and Mountain Leverage’s initial and subsequent evaluations and the notable return on investment calculations, we felt confident that a voice solution would be suitable for us and the challenging circumstances which we were experiencing, so we decided to proceed with the project.”*



The Solution

Seamlessly integrating with the business’s recently installed Microsoft Dynamics AX warehouse management system, the new voice solution is now a fully functioning component within Sealey’s picking process, enabling its warehouse workers to keep up with demand and breeze through the ever-increasing number of pick lists. Workers are equipped with a compact wearable Honeywell A730X mobile computer and a headset and receive audible picking instructions as they are guided through the most optimum routes throughout the warehouse, helping to streamline picking efficiencies and drastically decrease pick times, enabling orders to be packed and dispatched, often on the same day of receipt.

Simon Tricker, Warehouse Manager at Sealey comments, *“The new voice-picking solution is fantastic and has totally realigned the way that we work. Pick lists are sent directly to the workers via their headsets, enabling them to seamlessly move between different product picks at various locations in the warehouse. Despite some initial scepticism of the voice solution in the first instance by some of the workers, as it was different to the mobile scanners that they were previously using, the new solution has made their job much easier. Voice technology was quickly adopted by the workers and widely advocated as an improvement over the ‘old’ method. The solution also enables us to keep track of what has been picked via a series of dashboards and the accuracy of our orders has also improved, as well as the speed at which they are able to be picked. We can also keep a firm handle on workers’ productivity levels and provide assistance to those who may need it.”*

The Result

The results of the new voice solution have been far-reaching. So much so, Sealey is already looking to expand the solution to accommodate other processes within the warehouse such as put-away, replenishment and packing.

Thompson explains, *“Very often when you supercharge one area of a warehouse, and it subsequently becomes more efficient, other areas of the warehouse need to catch up! Since the installation of the voice solution went so smoothly, thanks to the skillset of Dakota and Mountain Leverage, we are now looking to integrate it into other areas of the warehouse. For us, the new solution has become instrumental in keeping up with demand. Our issues were exacerbated by a lack of staff following the Covid pandemic and the fact that we are situated in a high employment area. Our picking performance, despite maintaining our current staffing, has definitely improved. This helps us to maintain our service levels, keep our customers happy and ensure that we remain one step ahead of our competitors.”*

Despite allocating a couple of weeks for the ‘go-live’ process, this ended up taking only a few days, and Sealey were up and running with the new solution in no time.

Thompson concludes, *“Despite the best assurances from Dakota and Mountain Leverage that the go-live process would be a smooth transition, we still had our reservations. There is always significant jeopardy in implementing changes to your core processes, however we were delighted that the careful planning and coordination of all the components of the project resulted in a smooth transition.*

The benefits of the new solution are incredible. While it is too early for meaningful statistical analysis, there are already visible signs of significant upturns in productivity. We are seeing far more frequent clearing of picking work on a daily basis, enabling us to clear the decks of shipments by the time our couriers leave the warehouse at 7:00pm. Before the installation of the new solution, we would have to pick and pack around 20% of orders the day after they were received, but this number has been dramatically reduced, often to zero, meaning that even orders received at 5:30pm can frequently be picked, packed and shipped on the same day.

We are absolutely delighted with our new solution and are extremely thankful for the professionalism displayed by both Dakota and Mountain Leverage in helping to make this a reality for us. We are very much looking forward to the next steps in our voice journey and will fully embrace working with both companies throughout the entire voice adoption process.”

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Learn more:

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